

VZCZCXRO0980
PP RUEHRN
DE RUEHMR #0500 2781429
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 051429Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2334
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP PRIORITY
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 2658

C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 000500

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S; MCC FOR DEIDRA FAIR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/2/2016

TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: GOL MOVES AHEAD ON GENDER EQUALITY LEGISLATION

REF: MASERU 435

CLASSIFIED BY: June Carter Perry, Ambassador, EXEC , STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

CLASSIFIED BY: June Carter Perry, Ambassador, EXEC , STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (SBU) Summary: After months of intra-cabinet debate, rigorous NGO lobbying, and considerable hand-wringing, the Government of Lesotho appears poised to secure a gender equality bill that will end official discrimination against married women on a variety of legal matters. The current draft legislation before Parliament appears to meet core Millennium Challenge Corporation expectations, including the right of women to own property and to enter into commercial contracts. Local observers expect Parliament to enact the bill before the end of the year. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On September 19, the Government of Lesotho's Cabinet finally approved a draft version of the "Married Persons Equality Bill," legislation that is intended to address de jure gender inequality issues. The GOL tabled the bill before Parliament on September 22 for an initial reading. Embassy sources expect that Parliament will begin debate the bill soon after the conclusion of Lesotho's 40th Independence Day celebrations, planned for the week of October 2-6.

13. (C) During a dinner at the CMR on October 2 for visiting Foreign Service Director General Staples (septel), Minister of Gender, Youth, Sports, and Recreation Lepono and Minister of Finance and Development Planning Thahane stated that Parliament, in recess for the independence holidays, will resume on October 13. The two ministers expect a second reading and official passage of the women's equity law by December.

14. (C) Ambassador Perry discussed the need for women's equity directly with the Speaker of the House and with Finance Minister Thahane on September 27 and 28, respectively. The Speaker actually initiated subject, telling the Ambassador "we are on course" to table the "Married Persons Equality Bill." Speaker Motsamai, a former President of the SADC Parliamentary Forum and current Vice Chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, said she was "relieved" that this matter would finally be resolved and would be a victory for all Basotho women.

15. (C) Minister Thahane echoed similar sentiments to the Ambassador and emphasized that the wording of the legislation would meet Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) criteria. The Ambassador stressed the importance of this consonance with already delineated MCA criteria. The legislation would also

demonstrate more broadly Lesotho's commitment to women's equity, an especially significant fact in light of the country's current role as SADC Chair.

16. (C) Comment: Lesotho's prospects for signing a Compact agreement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) are largely contingent on passage of this bill, as well as genuine efforts to ensure equal access by women to MCC resources. The Ambassador, Embassy officers, and various MCC officials have long urged GOL action to address codified gender inequality. GOL officials have readily agreed to the need for legislation, but explained that various provisions in earlier drafts had raised "sensitive cultural and family custody issues" that delayed forward movement on the bill. The current draft approved by the Cabinet appears to meet core MCC expectations, including the right of women to own property and to enter into commercial contracts. End Comment.

MURPHY